



THE MONTGOMERY INSTITUTE

Guided by the Leadership Legacy of G. V. 'Sonny' Montgomery

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INSTITUTE'S "RURAL PLACE BUILDING" PROGRAM GARNERS "INNOVATOR AWARD" FOR MISSISSIPPI

MERIDIAN, MS – The Montgomery Institute will receive the Southern Growth Policies Board "2010 Innovator Award" for Mississippi at its 13-state conference in Kentucky this June.

"The Montgomery Institute's important work to enhance the economic vitality of the West Alabama-East Mississippi region is exemplary," said Governor Haley Barbour, trustee and past chairman of the Southern Growth Policies Board. "I congratulate TMI on its successful efforts to build great rural places and wealth through entrepreneurship, even during these challenging economic times."

Ted Abernathy, executive director of the Southern Growth Policies Board (SGPB), said the Institute's innovative Rural Place Building Program was the basis for the award.

"I am pleased to inform you that The Montgomery Institute has been selected to represent Mississippi as the winner of the Southern Growth Policies Board 2010 Innovator Award," he said. "Your program, Rural Place Building, was chosen from a strong pool of nominees in the Southern region as an outstanding initiative that helps communities recover from the economic downturn."

Founded in Meridian in the year 2000, The Montgomery Institute (TMI) has a mission to "upbuild people, places, programs, and the region of East Mississippi and West Alabama." Its Rural Place Building approach to development guided implementation of the West Alabama-East Mississippi WIRED Initiative as well as the MyBiz Alabama-Mississippi Network. During 2009, the Institute opened an Alabama office in Monroeville to strengthen its bi-state operations.

TMI will be publicly recognized on June 7, 2010 in an awards ceremony and reception during Southern Growth's Chairman's Conference in Lexington, Kentucky, along with award winners from 12 other states.

“We accept this honor on behalf of our many partners,” said TMI president Bill Crawford. “Without them Rural Place Building would just be a title, not a series of accomplishments.”

The Southern Growth Policies Board award resulted from a nomination process. TMI accomplishments leading to the award include:

1. WAEM Town/Main Street Charrettes/Program Coordination:

- TMI and partners identified the Your Town Alabama program as a best practice for rural community development. TMI modeled “WAEM Town” after Your Town for its 37-county region. It brings design and development professionals together with local leaders at a three-day retreat to teach them fundamentals of asset building. TMI successfully handed off the WAEM Town program to the Community Action Team at Mississippi State University beginning in 2010.
- TMI and partners also identified as an innovative practice a charrette process developed and offered by the Auburn Urban Studio. It brings the WAEM Town approach directly to communities. TMI got Mississippi Main Street to adopt this process for Mississippi. To date, Carthage, Newton, Columbus, Noxapater, Heidelberg, Covington County, Marion, Philadelphia, and DeKalb have held charrettes in the WAEM Region. Main Street now offers these services statewide.
- TMI and partners worked to coordinate WAEM Town and the Main Street charrettes with the Mississippi State University’s *First Impressions* program and the Mississippi Development Authority’s Asset Development Program. Communities found a progression through *First Impressions* and Asset Building to design charrettes is highly beneficial.



2. MyBizAM and Entrepreneurship:

- TMI, working with community colleges, developed the innovative MyBiz Alabama-Mississippi Network and related website, MyBiz.AM. The goal is to aid communities in developing “grow your own” strategies as alternatives to plant recruitment.
- Coordinated by TMI, colleges have worked directly with 391 communities to develop “entrepreneur champions” and Start It! Cards as first steps to becoming “enterprise-ready.”
- TMI developed the MyBiz.AM website with help from the University of Alabama to help rural communities better link entrepreneurs to the many support programs available. Today, 2,888 registered users can access 213 service providers through MyBiz.AM.
- TMI initiated a multi-agency workgroup, encouraged by Governor Haley Barbour. It formulated a set of policy recommendations to enhance entrepreneurship and small business development in Mississippi – Balancing Recruitment With Entrepreneurship (BRWE). These recommendations have been completed and submitted agencies and policy groups for review.



3. Mayors Network/Regional Summits:

- RUPRI's Center for Regional Competiveness says rural communities must design regional strategies to be competitive. TMI hosts quarterly meetings of mayors from 33 communities to focus on regional issues and strategies. TMI has also hosted regional summits on entrepreneurship, forestry, and regional competitiveness to help regional leaders understand opportunities and challenges.
- TMI is in the process of revamping the Commission on the Future to serve as a successor leadership organization to the WAEM WIRED Commission appointed by Governors Haley Barbour and Bob Riley.

4. Regional Training Framework/Online Access/Stackable Credentials:

- Another regional strategy developed by TMI and its partners focuses on building a competitive, regional, advanced manufacturing workforce. TMI and community college partners formed the WAEM Alliance, developed a regional training framework to guide investments, and crafted a regional advanced manufacturing credential based on national skill standards.
- TMI and partners designed the Modern Multi-skill Manufacturing (M3) Credential to prepare workers for a variety of advanced manufacturing jobs in the WAEM Region. High schools also utilize the program. A number of dual enrollment programs have been developed with community colleges.
- Workers and students in rural areas are challenged to get to out-of-town training programs. The innovative Amatrol Anytime Anywhere e-Learning System developed by TMI and partners provides online access to over 450 virtual training modules. This allows individuals to access training at home, at the workplace, at libraries, and at one-stop career centers.

